

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Unified Communications



Director of the Office of Unified Communications

E. Michael Latessa

Confirmation Resolution of 2006

April 24, 2006

Good morning Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee and Council, staff, and guests. My name is E. Michael Latessa, Interim Director of the Office of Unified Communications (OUC).

I am pleased to have the opportunity to be considered by the committee as the Mayor's nominee for the position of Director of the Office of Unified Communications. Thank you for the opportunity to be considered for this important position.

I want to speak to you about the Office of Unified Communications and our performance during the period of October 2004 to the present.

As the Chair and the members of the Committee are aware, the District of Columbia experienced many problems in its emergency/non-emergency communications system prior to October 2004.

As a result, both the Mayor and the City Council slated this function and service for overhaul. This decision was taken as the first step to improvement of 911 service delivery. Our goal has always been two simple ones.

One, to become more efficient and effective in answering emergency and non-emergency service calls and two, to dispatch emergency response units to the correct location.

Let's for a moment talk a little about the history. Back in 2001 police and fire call takers and dispatchers were co-located into the same public safety communications center facility. Even though these employees were co-located they were working from very different operating procedures, policies and organizational structures.

Between 2001 and 2004, these two divisions, the one in the Metropolitan Police Department and the one in the Fire and Emergency Medical Services department had six (6) different directors of which each lead effort to improve service delivery of the 911/311 system.

Data will show however that service delivery during this time period suffered at the expense of the public and citizens of the District of Columbia.

In February 2004, I was hired to facilitate the development and transition of consolidating police and fire communications and the Mayor's City Wide Call Center into one new agency – The Office of Unified Communications.

As many of you may recall, the implementation and transition to the OUC was not suppose to occur until October 1, 2005 which would have allowed for more planning, organizing, and partnering with the Union to successfully and seamlessly transition all employees to the new agency.

It was later decided shortly after my arrival in February 2004, that the implementation of the OUC would occur one year earlier, so we began in October 1, 2004.

Between April 2004 and October 2004, after learning of the decision to implement the OUC one year earlier, I became more involved in the day-to-day operations of the police and fire communications divisions.

To improve service delivery and increase performance of the communications divisions' radical changes were made to correct deficiencies. Upon my arrival at the Public Safety Communications Center (PSCC), I began evaluating the current PSCC operation and identified, major deficiencies and problems with respect to process and technology. In effect, instead of working on a single level, optimizing the current system, I had to simultaneously optimize the PSCC operation, establish a foundation and organization plan for the new agency, and repair degrading technical and facility infrastructures that threatened the ability to provide public safety services to the citizens of the District.

In October 2004, I was named Interim Director of the OUC and continued leading the effort to transition and combine these three separate functions into one.

Under my direction and leadership during the past 28 months, the Universal Call Taker program was successfully reorganized, skill deficiencies were addressed, and a training curriculum was developed and executed.

As a result, the first 17 Universal Call Takers (UCTs) were successfully deployed to operations in August 2004. The success of the UCT pilot program further supported my decision to expand and extend the pilot to include existing call takers.

Today, I am proud to say that the Office of Unified Communications employees 53 UCTs and will continue to train, hire, and promote existing and new personnel.

In my initial assessment of the three agencies (Metropolitan Police Department, Fire Emergency Medical Services, and the Mayor's Citywide Call Center) that were combined to form the Office of Unified Communications, my observations revealed extreme challenges such as: three separate and extremely different pay structures, varying training programs and training philosophies, no standardized operating procedures, and deficient public safety communications technology and equipment.

In an effort to create parity among staff, OUC worked with the DC Office of Personnel for over 21 months to classify and compensate all operational positions which include Universal Call Taker (grades 8 and 9); Dispatcher (grades 10 and 11); Trainers (grade 11); Training Supervisor (MSS 12); Assistant Watch Commander (grade MSS 12), Watch Commander (grade MSS 13), and Operations Manager (MSS 14). The chart illustrates the disparities in the inherited former pay structure and the adjustments made to equalize the positions within the new structure of the Office of Unified Communications.

Before October 1, 2004 MPD and FEMS Classification & Pay Structure			After October 1, 2004 OUC Classification and Pay Structure		
	Grade	Salary		Grade	Salary
Call Takers			Universal Call Taker		
Fire Communications Operator	6	\$34,568	Universal Call Taker	8	\$38,890
	7	\$37,316		9	\$41,617
	8	\$38,890			
Police Communications Operator	6	\$34,568			
Dispatcher			Dispatcher		
Lead Fire Communications Operator (Dispatcher)	9	\$41,617	Dispatcher	10	\$45,835
Police Communications Operator (Dispatcher)	7	\$37,316		11	\$48,745
Police Communications Operator (Sr. Dispatcher)	8	\$38,890			
Trainers			Trainers		
Fire Communication Monitor Instructor (Trainers)	10	\$45,835	Training Instructors	11	\$48,745
Lead Police Communications Operator (Trainers)	9	\$34,832			

An entry level Universal Call Taker will now earn an average increase of \$4,324 annually; likewise, an entry level Dispatcher and Trainer will earn an average increase of \$4,218 and \$2,910 respectively. The new structure and grading scale has developed a career ladder for OUC employees to promote retention and career development within the agency and also to compensate our emergency first responders at a rate commensurate with the type of work that they perform. Several of my staff have often commented that “more has been accomplished and achieved for them within 20 months as an employee of the OUC than within years and years of service under their former agencies”. In addition to working to improve with the union and other agency personnel to accomplish these goals that invest in the human capital of the agency, I have also been very intimately involved in improving the systems and technology that helps us all perform our jobs more efficiently and more effectively.

During my initial evaluation of the current PSCC technology, one of the deficient systems that I identified was the AVL (Automatic Vehicle Locator) system. The AVL tracks EMS units which are dispatched based on location.

My assessment of the system determined that less than half were working properly and none were installed correctly. Since identifying the problem with the AVLs and assigning technicians to correct the problems, over 91% of these systems are working and functioning properly.

Another system deficiency was the CAD (computer aided dispatch). This system is now stable and working as a result of changes I made in technical personnel and my ability to work more closely with the vendor and the company president. This relationship has elevated the District's status as a premier client which gives the OUC enhanced service at no additional cost. I also successfully completed the task of upgrading the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) software within a 3-week period without the benefit of a testing and trial phase.

Representative samples of our initiatives are as follows:

- Initiated D.C. Wide Area Network (DCWAN) Search and Discovery Audit of Public Safety Communications Center (PSCC) and discovered serious deficiencies within the network and sever single points of failure
- Initiated the rebuilding of the Public Safety Communications Center (PSCC) Local Area Network (LAN) in conformance with the D.C. Wide Area Network (DCWAN) SRD recommendations
- Reorganized staff to meet the standard of answering 90% of all 911 calls within 5 seconds
- Managed and executed Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) upgrade in a three week period
- Identified Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) issue and developed corrective action plan
- Developed scope of work (SOW) to revamp Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) system and secured funding through FEMS
- Identified Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) issue that would prevent MDT (mobile data terminal) program from working and addressed same
- Developed/Implemented strategies to reduce call to queue time for fire calls
- Developed/Implemented strategies to reduce call to queue time for police calls
- Overall reduction in complaints of service by 50%
- Developed/Implemented ANI/ALI strategies to complete "end-to-end" E-911 project
- Completed wireless phase II testing in December 2004
- Developed structured organizational chart for the Office of Unified Communications (OUC)
- Revised 911 answering message to direct caller "not to hang up" in the event that a caller reached the queue
- Revised 911 answering message to include Spanish
- Attended over 100 hundred public forums, neighborhood association meetings, citizen summit, bilingual job fair, and ANC ward meetings in each of the District's 8 wards
- Resolved MOSCAD station alerting and printer issues
- Resolved auxiliary electrical and power problems plaguing the Public Safety Communications Center (PSCC) by executing corrective action plan
- Completed microwave backup project

- Addressed continuing Office of Property Management (OPM) facility related problems by securing a resident building engineer.
- Increased bilingual staff by 100%
- Received 1 millionth service request at the Citywide Call Center in August 2005
- Maintained an average of 95% all 911 calls answered within 5 seconds or less
- Maintained an average of 96% of all 311 calls answered with 11 seconds or less

- Created the Quality Assurance / Quality Control unit to monitor and evaluate emergency calls in January 2006
- Developed career ladder for operational employees with an average grade increase of 2
- Increased salaries of operational employees by an average of \$3,800 per employee

The consolidation of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department resulted in radical changes for both agencies. Employees were combined, systems integrated, and processes improved.

Sometimes radical redesign and reorganization of an enterprise (wiping the slate clean) is necessary to achieve the goal of increased quality of service.

Although change is never easy, today, the District's Office of Unified Communications employs a diverse and knowledge-based workforce composed of individuals with a broad spectrum of 911 responder experience.

I am proud to say that we have achieved an important milestone in the ongoing improvements to our emergency communications capability in the District of Columbia.

We now employ a workforce of call-takers and dispatchers who served formally with the Metropolitan Police Department and Fire and Emergency Medical Services (FEMS).

When you call 911 you are calling a service for all types of emergencies: police, fire, emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous material spills, etc.

The first thing the initial 911 call taker does is determine what type of problem you are having in order to decide which dispatcher should take your call and what type of response to send. I think we would all agree that over the last 28 months we have successfully reengineered the 911 business process and through analysis and redesign of workflow within and between civilian call-takers and dispatchers have "Reengineered" the way we do business here in the Nations Capital.

In September 2003, 65% of all 911 calls were answered within 5 seconds or less and 65% of 311 calls were answered in 11 seconds or less. "Reengineered processes" within the Office of Unified Communications have significantly improved public safety communications service delivery in the Nations Capital. Today, the Office of Unified Communications answers 95% of all 911 calls within 5 seconds or less and 96% of all 311 calls within 11 seconds or less. Another critical measure within the Office of Unified Communications is the abandon call rate. In November 2003, 10.9% of all calls were abandoned; but today, only 2.8% of calls are abandoned which is a significant achievement from the benchmark of 6%. With changing demographics across the District of Columbia, the Office of Unified Communications has recognized the need for bilingual call takers. As of today, OUC employees 13 full-time bilingual call takers and is training another 12 bilingual call takers to meet the demand of non-English speaking citizens. These 12 new bilingual call takers will be deployed to operations on Sunday, April 30th to begin answering emergency 911 police calls. The addition of these 12 call takers will increase our total to 25 full-time bilingual call takers.

We are now moving ahead with reforms aimed at resolving much of our past problems. These new systems will continue to provide first class responder services to the citizens of the District of Columbia.

Yet, all of this cannot be sustained without an equal investment in our greatest assets the human capital. We are committed to workplace productivity through labor-management cooperation and employee participation.

As part of this commitment, we have established the position of Deputy Director for Human Capital. It is our desire to enhance and build a model partnership in cooperative behavior and to work together to improve productivity and reduce conflict.

There are two key principles that are central to the human capital idea. First, people are assets whose value can be enhanced through investment. As with any investment, the goal is to maximize value while managing risk.

As the value of our people increases, so does the performance capacity of the organization, and therefore its value to the citizens and the other stakeholders.

Second, an organization's human capital policies must be aligned to support the organization's "shared vision" ---- that is, the mission, vision for the future, core values, goals and objectives, and strategies by which the organization has defined its direction and its expectations for itself and its people.

We pledged to insure that all human capital policies and practices of the Office of Unified Communications shall be designed, implemented, and assessed by the standard of how well they help the organization pursue its shared vision.

Our goal is to maintain a high performance organization that recognizes that our organization's people largely determine our capacity to perform.

We understand that the value of our organization is dependent on the value we place on our people.

We know that enhancing the value of our employees is a win-win goal for both the employer and employees alike. We recognize that this value can be enhanced with nurturing and investment.

We recognize that employees vary in their talents and motivations, and that a variety of incentive strategies and working arrangements can be created to enhance each employee's contributions to organizational performance. We hope to find a path in which managers and the Union join together to act in ways that will make sense in both business and human terms.

We are firmly dedicated to attaining significant high levels of performance and accountability and to institutionalize the Office of Unified Communications as premier organization within our public safety community.

To do so, we shall depend on the Deputy Director for Human Capital to help us with the cornerstone enabler of institutionalization: People, because our people define our character and our capacity to perform and our People are our agency. In order to maintain our successes and to build upon them for the future, we are pledged to the principles of labor-management cooperation. I have asked the Deputy Director for Human Capital to undertake a Self-Assessment for the Office of Unified Communications as the starting point for creating "human capital" strategy which is committed to find ways to enhance labor-management "cooperation" within OUC.

To meet the new challenges facing us, the Office of Unified Communications shall develop our employees, in partnership with their "Union Representatives".

We will work with the Union on ways to achieve the three key drivers of workplace success, an effective Workforce environment, and a winning program of skills training and workforce compensation. We are committed to a program to retain, recruit, better pay and provide opportunities for all those who seek to move up the management ranks.

During the next year, we want to develop, maintain and nurture a workforce environment which is pro labor, one in which workers and managers can work together harmoniously to increase productivity and to improve upon service quality.

To do this, I have pledged, to work with the Union, to do the development of a model "Partnership Council: which would have responsibility for the management of the employee "wellness program" at our new facility.

We expect this body will take the lead responsibility for such things as the employee cafeteria, the nurse station, the employee gym, and the operations of the common amenities, as well as play a vital role in the operations of the child development center.

Secondly, we propose that this Partnership Council take a lead on helping us develop programs which focuses on the training of our people so that we continue to ever improve upon our first responder skills.

We shall explore the best ways to fund training programs which permits employees to learn the job and acquire other skills sets to better enable them to perform as team leaders, supervisors, and managers. We are committed to providing our employees with this competitiveness. To do so we will give human capital a high priority.

This is our commitment Mr. Chairman ---- We pledge excellence--- we pledge to work with you and the other members of this Committee, the Council and the Union, as we modernize the human capital policies and practices for the Office of Unified Communications.

Our desire is to provide, to retain, and to recruit, by attracting employees with critical skills and to provide performance incentives and training programs that motivate and empower our employees.

We hope to build management-labor relationships that are based on common interests and the public trust, and we seek the Union's help in developing modern human capital policies and practices in order to offer our employees a means to help us improve our efficiency, and effectiveness and to better serve the citizens of the District of Columbia.

With me here today is my Deputy Director of Human Capital, Jose Guiterrez and my Chief of Staff, Everett D.Lott. We would be pleased to respond to any questions you or the committee may have at this time.